

NORTH AND SOUTH

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A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back.”
Isaiah 43:6.

IN the fullness of the promised days when the Jews shall be restored from their wanderings, and all the seed of Jacob shall again meet in their own land, God in His mighty providence will speak to all the nations, saying: “To the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back”; and at the divine bidding free passage shall be given, all hindrances shall be removed, and His own people shall come to their own land. Entailed on Abraham’s seed by a covenant of salt, the Holy Land shall receive again its rightful heritors, the banished shall come to their own again, and no nation or people shall keep them back. So much for the *literal* meaning. I am unable to indulge you with fuller details, for I have no skill in guessing at the meaning of dark passages, but leave such things to those to whom it is given, or who think it is given to them. We shall now pursue the *spiritual* teaching of the passage.

At this moment, my brothers and sisters, we who follow the footsteps of King Jesus are soldiers of an army which has invaded this world. This land belongs to our great leader, for He made it; it is right that everywhere, all round the globe, His name should be honored, for He is the King among the nations, and the Governor of them. But our race has revolted, set up another monarch, and bowed its strength to support another dynasty—the dynasty of darkness and death; our race has broken the good and wholesome laws of the great Lord, the rightful King, and set up new laws and new customs altogether opposed to right and the truth of God; this is the great rebellion, the revolt of manhood, the sedition of sinners. Now, no king will willingly lose his dominions, and therefore the great King of kings has sent His Son to conquer this world by force of arms, though not by arms of steel, or weapons that cut and kill and wound, yet by arms far more mighty! And this earth is to be yet subdued to the kingdom of the Crown Prince, the Prince Imperial of heaven, Jesus Christ, the Lord! We, His regenerated people, form part of the army of occupation; we have invaded the land. Hard and stern has been the battle up to this point; we have had to win every inch of ground by sheer push of pike; effort after effort has been put forth by the Church of God under the guidance of her heavenly Leader, and none has been in vain. Up to now the Lord has helped us, but there is much yet to be done. Canaanites and Hivites, and Jebusites have to be driven out; yes, in fact the whole world still seems to lie in darkness, and under the dominion of the wicked one. We do but hold here and there a sacred fortress for truth and holiness in the land, and these we must retain till the Lord Jesus shall send us more prosperous times, and the battle shall be tamed against the foe, and the kingdom shall come unto our Prince. Nor is there any fear but that such a time will come—therefore let us have courage! Soldiers of the cross, have faith! Have faith in your great Leader, for behold, He is still at the head of you, and is still omnipotent! The hour of His weakness is past; His sun set once in blood, but it has risen to go down no more; once was it eclipsed at noon day, but now the Sun of righteousness arises with healing beneath His wings! He who died once for all, is now life’s source, center, and Lord! The living Christ is present among us as the Commander-in-Chief of the church militant; let us refresh our souls by drawing near to Him by the power of the Holy Spirit!

The text has two grand matters in it. First, here is *the royalty of the word*—where the word of this King is there is power; secondly, here is *the word of royalty*, and that word we may well consider, for where the word of this King is, there is wisdom.

I. First, here is THE ROYALTY OF THE WORD. It is more than an imperial edict; it is the fiat of omnipotence! Jesus Christ says to the north, “Give up,” and it does give up; and to the south, “Keep not back,” and it cannot keep back.

I understand from reading this declaration that there is a general opposition in the world to the cause and kingdom of God, for until He says, "Give up," and, "Keep not back," men do not crowd to Immanuel's feet, and even the chosen of God do not come forth from their hiding places; all the world over there is a general opposition to the cause of Christ, to the doctrine of truth, to the throne of God; go where you may, in the highest places of the earth, you shall find true religion despised. Among the lowest of the land you shall find that same religion blasphemed, and in the middle classes, where some seem to fancy that all virtue resides, you shall find carelessness about the things of the world to come, and carking carefulness about the selfishness of this present life. Jesus Christ is everywhere despised in comparison with the things that perish; they will not have this man to reign over them! The trees of the wood reject heaven's cedar, and choose hell's bramble; even the eleven sell the true Joseph into Egypt; nor is there one found who will defend the chosen of God. Go among savage nations, and there the idol is worshipped, but Jesus is not known; go among civilized nations, and lo, they have only changed their idols! They have rebaptized their infants, given new names to the objects of their superstitious reverence, but the true Christ is misunderstood and rejected. Go to the swarthy Hindu, the man of deep philosophy and sophistry, and you shall find his heart set against the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth; and then sail over the blue sea to the islands of the deep, and man in his simplicity worships he knows not what, but not the Incarnate God! Traverse the central parts of continents where as yet civilization has scarcely reached and you shall find that man is still opposed to his Maker, and hates the name of the only begotten Son of God. Nor need we travel or even look abroad; the opposition is universal among ourselves, among the old, among the young! Striking is that text, "They go astray from the womb, speaking lies." An old Puritan puts it: "They go astray before they go; they speak lies before they speak." And so it is. Before it comes to acts, the evil propensity is in the *heart*; and before the lips can frame the falsehood, there is the lie within the soul; from the earliest infancy to palsied age nothing seems to cure manhood of its rebellious disposition. The carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not reconciled to God; neither, indeed, while it remains what it is, can it be. There is a general opposition to the cause and kingdom of Christ.

But the text seems to hint that there is a particular form of that opposition in each case; there is a word to the north, a different word from that which is given to the south. The north holds fast, and therefore the word is, "Give up." The south retires, is despairing, therefore it is said, "Keep not back." The opposition takes different shapes, and there is a different word to meet its ever varying forms. How true is Dr. Watts' verse—

*"We wander each a different way,
But all the downward road."*

As each land has its own tribes of wild animals, so has each heart its indigenous sins; all land will grow weeds, but you will not find the same sort of weed equally abundant in every soil; so in one heart the deadly nightshade of ignorance chokes the seed, and in another the prickly thistle of malice crowds out the wheat. There are difficulties in reaching the heart of any man, but not the same difficulties in all men; some, for instance, cannot be influenced because of their lack of intelligence; others because of their supposed learning. Some cannot be reached because of their presumption; others because of their despondency; some spend their all upon the pleasures of this world; others spend nothing but find their pleasure simply in hoarding, yet are they equally averse to heavenly things. Whatever form sin takes, it is the same opposition, but yet it may need a different mode of treatment, and by a different weapon will it have to be overcome. My dear brother in Christ, you perhaps have a different personal, spiritual difficulty from mine; I have no wish to change with you, and I should not advise you to change with me. The same is true with our trials in winning souls; we have each our difficulties, but they are not precisely alike in detail; you have to fight the north perhaps, and I the south, but the same Lord and Master can make us victorious, and without Him we shall be equally defeated! The opposition which we encounter in serving our Lord is the same, depend upon it; you need not say, "Mine is a peculiarly hard task," or if you do, I may say the same of mine; after all, both tasks are impossibilities without God, and both labors shall be readily performed if Jesus speaks the divine fiat, and says to the north, "Give up; and to the south, Keep not back."

Further, as there is in all an opposition, and as there is in each a distinct opposition, so no power can in any case, subdue any part of the world to Christ apart from Him. It is possible that you may fall in

with a family which seems to be naturally religious: you may even meet with tribes of people who appear to be spontaneously inclined to godliness, but if you bring the religion of Christ to them, you will find that their very religiousness is the greatest difficulty you have to deal with! Some, on the other hand, never could be superstitious; the conformation of their mind is that of practical, sound, common sense, but do not deceive yourself with the idea that their conversion is any the easier; you may preach the gospel in the most forcible way to them, and you will find that this very common sense of theirs will be the main difficulty to be overcome. Believe me, however intent you may be in winning souls to Christ; you shall never meet with one who can be subdued to Christ by any persuasions of yours apart from the working of His own power! I know the preacher has thought within himself, "I have only to put the truth in a reasonable way, and the man will see it." Ah, sir, but sinners are *not* reasonable; they are the most unreasonable of all creatures; none are so senseless, none act so madly as they do! "But," says one, "If I were to tell them of the love of Christ in an affectionate, loving way, that would reach them." Yes, but you will find that all your affection, your tears, and earnest delineation of the love of Jesus will be powerless against human hearts unless the eternal Spirit shall drive home your appeals. We know some who have been reasoned with, and if logic could win them, they ought to have been won long ago; they have also been persuaded, and if rhetoric could reach them, they ought to have turned away from their evil ways years ago, but all human art has been tried and tried, and tried in vain. Yet there is no room for despair, for Jesus can conquer the unconquerable and heal the incurable!

Do not be disappointed, dear brother, if you have up to now failed in your efforts; you have but proved that "vain is the help of man." You see now by experience that "it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy." It is yours to try and bring that soul to Jesus: but it lies with Him to perform the work. Duty is ours, the result is God's; if the soil of the field committed to me will never yield a harvest, I am yet bound to plow it if my Lord commands. If I could foresee that my child would never turn to the Lord, yet I ought not to slacken my efforts for its conversion; I have to do with my Master's command, and what He bids me do I am bound to do. Never let us be surprised when we are defeated, for we ought to know that old Adam is far too strong for us; if we assail him single-handed, we cannot expect to cast out the devil—he laughs us to scorn if we attempt to exorcise him in our own name! We may speak as we will, but if it is only *we* who speak; the devil will say, "Jesus I know, and the Holy Spirit I know, but who are you? I do not yield to you! I will not go out of this sinner, in spite of all your persuasions and all your talk!" Do not forget that there is a general opposition to the kingdom of Christ—such opposition as no *human* power can by any possibility overcome.

But, my brethren, here is the point of the text: that opposition, whatever form it assumes, though not to be subdued by our agency alone, shall assuredly yield before the fiat of our great King when He says, to the north, "Give up; and to the south, Keep not back." His word is a word of power wherever it comes. Let us rejoice, then, whatever place we dwell in, that we have only to ask the King Himself to come there, and to speak with power, and we shall see conversions; conversions most numerous, that shall glorify His name! I fully believe that the dark time of any true Christian Church is just the period when it ought to have most hope, for when the Lord has allowed us to spin ourselves out till there is no more strength in *us*, then it is that He will come to our rescue! What could have been lower than the condition into which we, as a church, had sunk some 17 years ago? But a little faithful band used to meet in that dreary chapel in Park Street, and cry unto the Lord, never ceasing their prayers; and, oh, how soon the house began to fill, and how speedily our tent was too small for us, and we broke forth on the right hand and on the left—and God made the desolate places to be inhabited! Members of other churches, you have the same God to go to! Go to Him! He can work the same wonders for you! Look to the Most High, and not to man, or ministers, or modes, or methods, but only to HIM, and the guidance of His Spirit! "Well, but ours is a village," says one. And is not He the Lord of the villages? Is He the Lord of the cities, and not the Lord of the hamlets? "But our chapel is ugly, and built in a back street," says one, "Nobody knows of its existence; we shall never get the people within its obscure and dreary walls." Is God the God of the wide thoroughfares, and not of the lanes? Does not the Lord know the back streets as well as the broad ones? Was not that the question in disputes of old? Is He the God of the hills, and not the God of the valleys?

I have already put it in another shape to you; in His name I ask you, can anything be too hard for the Lord? Perhaps in your sphere of service you have grown so dispirited that you are inclined to say, "I may as well give up all further effort; no good will result from my endeavors." But what have you told the Master, and what have you sought at His hand? Have you told Him all your discouragements? Have you asked Him to speak with power, and has He refused you? If so, then give it up, but not till then—for He can even now "Say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back." And as when He said to the thick primeval darkness, "Let there be light," and the light leaped into being, and the darkness fled, so can He, amid the gross darkness of our huge city, or the not less dense darkness of our villages, create light to our astonishment, and to His glory! It is the King's Word we need—nothing short of it, and nothing more! We must get that by prayer; we must wait upon Him with importunity; if there are only two or three whose hearts break over the desolations of the church; if we have only half a dozen who resolve to give the Lord no rest till He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth, we shall see great things yet! A handful of people who resolve if a blessing is to be had, they will have it, and that if souls are not saved it shall be the sovereignty of God that prevents it, and nothing else—such a mere handful shall win the day! If they *will* have souls saved, if so they plead and agonize, oh, then the Lord will turn His gracious hand and send a plenteous stream of blessings upon their district, for where He wills it, the blessings must come, and He always wills to display His grace where and when He leads His people to pray for it!

Before I leave this point, let me say the power of the King's Word is always exercised in full consistency with the free agency of man; you must not think when we say that Christ has His will, and works omnipotently in men's hearts, that we imagine that He violates the free agency which He has created! He says to the north, "Give up," and that does it, for a *word* is a suitable instrument by which to rule a free agent. The way to make blocks of timber move would be to drag them, and if we wish to shape them, we must hew them with the axe, or cut them with a saw; but the way to deal with men is to *speak* with them. That is how Jesus operates; His power is exerted in conformity with the laws of human mind; He does not violate the free agency of man, though He does as He wills with man; His word is an instrument consistent with our mental nature, and He uses that word wisely. He says to the north, "Give up." He says to the south, "Keep not back." His word touches the secret spring and sets all in motion. No man is ever taken to heaven against His will, though I do not believe any man ever went there of his own free will till God's sovereign grace enlightened him, and *made him willing*. You must not suppose that Christ conquers human hearts by physical compulsion, such as the King of Prussia used, for instance, in subduing France, or such as a man uses in driving a horse; the Lord knows how to leave us free, and yet to make us do His bidding—and there lies the beauty of gospel influences!

Suppose man's will to be a room; if you and I want to open it, we break the lock. We do not understand the true method. But the Lord has the key, and knows how to open the door without a wrench; without violating even the most delicate spring in the watch, the maker knows how to regulate it. grace draws, but it is with hands of a man; it rules, but it is with a scepter of love. The fact is, the great dispute between Calvinists and Arminians has arisen very much through not understanding one another, and from one brother saying, "What I hold is the truth of God"; and the other saying, "What I hold is the truth of God, and nothing else." The men need somebody to knock both their heads together and fuse their beliefs into one! They need one capacious brain to hold both the truths of God which their two little heads contain, for God's Word is neither all on one side nor altogether on the other; it overlaps all systems, and defies all formulas; it lays the full responsibility of his ruin on man, but all the power and glory of grace it ascribes to God, and it is wise of us to do the same. The great King does as He wills among men as well as among the armies of heaven; who shall stay His hand, or say unto Him, "What are You doing?" He rules men as men, and not as inanimate stones; He has a scepter which is adapted to mind and spirit. The weapons of His warfare are not carnal; His forces rule the heart, the mind, the whole manhood as He has made it! And so He conquers, and becomes the happy King of willing subjects, who, though subdued by His power, are happy to acknowledge His sway! Thus much on the first point—the royalty of the Word of God.

II. Now we will consider THE WORD OF ROYALTY. The King says to the north, "Give up; and to the south, Keep not back."

We will not spend many minutes over these words, but just briefly hint at what meaning may be drawn from them. There are some persons to whom, when the powerful word of grace comes, it speaks in this way—"Give up. Give up." There are other persons, in another state of mind, to whom, whenever the word of salvation comes, it says, "Keep not back. Keep not back." Now, to those whom we find that it comes in this way, "Give up. Give up," you say, "I am righteous; I am no worse than others; I have broken the law, but not much; my sins are trivial; I do not deserve to be cast into hell for my small offenses! I have been not *perfect*, but as righteous as most; I have done this, I have done that, I have done the other." Ah, dear friend, the sword of divine grace will kill all this, and the message that God's mercy sends to you today is, "Give up!" Renounce your fancied goodness and deceitful self-esteem; oh, give up that spinning! It is a poor trade to spin cobwebs; give it up! Your father, Adam, taught you to make aprons of fig leaves, but it was *after* he had fallen; it is a bad business—give it up! Your own works will never cover you as you should be covered. There is a better righteousness than yours to be had; there is a better footing to stand before God upon than anything you have done; your refuges are all refuges of lies—give them up! That pretty righteousness of yours, which looks so pure, is only pure because your eyes are blind! If you could see it, it is all as black as filth can make it; you conceive your robe to be new and fair, but it is all riddled through and through with holes; the worms have devoured it; it is all moth-eaten and decayed. Give it up! Oh, give up that pharisaic mouthful, "God, I thank you," and betake yourself to the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" Give up your self-trust—it is a painted lie, a rotten plank, a foul deception, a false traitor; it promises salvation, but it brings sure damnation. JESUS is the sinner's only hope! Give up every other reliance!

Then too, you have an opposition in your hearts to the gospel. Concerning that also the word says to you, "Give up." Perhaps you were prejudiced against it foolishly and ignorantly; before you ever *heard* it, you felt persuaded you would not like it. Possibly you have been brought up in a religion of forms; you hardly think that salvation can be by simple faith in Jesus Christ; you feel a great deal of attachment to that regeneration of yours which was worked in your baptism, and to that confirmation of yours bestowed by the bishop's fingers. Besides, you have been so regular in your religion up till now that you can hardly stand to be told that the whole bundle of it is mere rubbish, not worth the time you have spent on it! You cannot endure to be told that—

"None but Jesus can do helpless sinners good."

But rest assured, the sooner you give up all those flattering reliances of yours, the better for you—for there is nothing in them! Even ceremonies that God has commanded are only of *spiritual* use to *spiritual* men, and since you are not a spiritual man, they cannot profit you. Have you in your heart an opposition to Christ? Can you not yield to Him as God? Can you not stoop to be saved entirely by His merits, and acknowledge Him for your lawgiver, and Teacher, and Guide? Then as, the text says, so I will say, and may the Lord apply the word—"Give up! Give up!" There is no salvation for you till you "give up" all ceremonial hopes and formal confidences! Strike the colors, man, before a broadside goes through you! Depend upon it, if you yield not in one way, you will in another; you shall either break or bow; you shall either TURN OR BURN! That is the alternative to every man born of woman; he must turn away from his enmity to Christ, and yield himself up to His love—or else he shall find the power of God in Christ to be his destruction!

It is possible, dear friends, that your opposition to Jesus Christ has taken the form of the love of a favorite sin. Now, there is nothing more certain than this: that you cannot be saved and keep your sins; they must be parted with. No man can carry fire in his bosom and yet be safe from burning; while you drink the poison, it must and will work death in you; the thief cannot expect mercy while he keeps the goods he has stolen. John Bunyan said that one day, when he was playing "cat" on a Sunday on the village green, he thought he heard a voice saying to him—"will you have your sins and go to hell, or leave your sins and go to heaven?" That question is put to every man who hears the gospel faithfully preached! Most men in their heart of hearts would like to have their sins and go to heaven, too, but that cannot be! While God is just, and heaven is holy, and truth is precious, it cannot be! What then? "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." Give up, give up! Give up your sin! What is the sin? Is it the drunk's cup? Away with the bewitching draught! Is it the drunk's

company? That is as damnable as his cup! Renounce such society at once! Is it blaspheming? O man, God rinse your mouth out of such black stuff as that! Have done with a sin for which there cannot be any excuse, for it cannot bring you any pleasure or profit, nor can there be any necessity for it; it is a degrading, useless, senseless, God-provoking crime! Is it some secret sin that must not be named lest the cheek of modesty be reddened? Give it up, friend! It will be much better for you to lose it though it were as precious as your right arm or your right eye, than to keep it and be cast into hell. The chamber of wantonness is the gate of death; flee from it without delay! The sins of the flesh are a deep ditch, and the abhorred of the Lord fall in.

But as you love your soul, O young man, escape like a bird from the fowler's snare! Here is the message from God to you—"Give up, give up your sin." Perhaps, though you hear the summons, you trifle with it and reply, "Yes; I mean to give them all up, and I hope by so doing I shall find my way to heaven. I shall deserve well of my Maker when I have denied myself *all* sinful pleasures." But stop! Let me not deceive you—this is not all! I fear that some men are not improved in their hearts when they are altered in their outward behavior. I am glad of the outward improvement, but I have sometimes fancied that they have only changed their *sins*, but not *given them up*! They show no leprosy in their skin, but it dies in their bones and their flesh. It is of little use to merely shift the region in which sin sets up its throne if its dominion is still undestroyed! It reminds one of the verse—

*"So when a raging fever burns,
We shift from side to side by turns;
And it is a poor relief we gain
To shift the place, but keep the pain."*

What if the man does not go to hell as a drunk; it will not remedy it if he is ruined by being self-righteous; as long as he is lost I do not see that it materially matters how! Many and many a man has given up outward sins, and set up a self-righteousness of his own, and said, "These are your gods, O Israel"; and so he fled from a bear and a lion slew him! He leaned on a wall, and a serpent bit him! All sin must be cast out of the throne of the heart, and whatever righteousness that is not *Christ's* righteousness must go with it! I would gladly put the sword-point to your heart, O sinner, and say, "Give up all that opposes Christ," for if you do not give it up, your soul will be lost.

In fact, dear friends, speaking to the children of God as well as to such as are not converted, I say, give up all, and have Christ! Give up all attempts to save yourself, and let Christ save you! Work afterwards, because He works in you to will and to do; but now do nothing either great or small to make yourself righteous, for Jesus did it all long, long ago! Do nothing by way of straining for merit, but begin to do everything by way of *gratitude*. "Give up"; that is, give up *yourself* to Christ, whatever His will may be. If it is His will that you be sick, that you be poor, that you die, give all up and say, "Your will be done; I resign all to You, my God." Does Jesus command you to do anything? Let it not be irksome to you; whatever He says to you, do it. Let there be no backstairs by which to play the truant—no keeping back of part of the price as though you would not do Christ's will except in some points. Give up unreservedly, and make no provision for the flesh! Let His will be your will; yield entirely! And if you have anything in this world of substance, of talent, of opportunity, "Give up." Begin with resignation; go on to obedience, and finish with consecration. "Give up, give up" till all is given up—body, soul, and spirit; a reasonable sacrifice to Him, till you can say—

*"Now Lord I would be Yours alone,
And wholly live to You."*

I perceive that my text has grown from a word to the sinner who has to be conquered, into a word directed to Christ's nearest and dearest friends, even to those who are the soldiers of His army; it is in effect a lofty, far-reaching precept, and would to God we could live up to it by presenting our all to Jesus our Lord!

Let us now spend a minute or two on the second Word of the King—"Keep not back." Is there some person within this assembly who feels within his heart the desire to come and confess his sins to his God? Standing at the filthy swine trough, does the prodigal say within himself, "I will arise and go unto my Father, and say unto Him, Father, I have sinned"? "Keep not back!" Quench not that holy flame! If you have a desire to come and acknowledge your transgressions to the pardoning Savior, let nothing

keep you back: neither fear, nor shame, nor procrastination! Rest not till you have reached the bosom of your God, and acknowledged all your guilt before Him! A repulse need not be feared, nor even an upbraiding; a rich, free, loving welcome is sure. “Keep not back.”

But is there another who has confessed his sin, but yet has found no peace? Do you see yonder Christ on the cross? “Yes,” you say, “I know there is life in a look at Him, but *may I* look?” My Master’s message to you is, “Keep not back! Keep not back,” for whoever looks shall be made whole, and none are forbidden to look! Does the crowd around the Savior hinder you, you sick and dying soul? Be not baffled by difficulty, but persevere; press into the thickest of the throng, for if you do but touch the hem of His garment, you shall be made whole! “Keep not back! Keep not back!” You may believe in Jesus now! *May you?* No, you are *commanded* to do it! And you are *threatened* if you do not, which proves that you have permission and something more! It is written—“He who believes not shall be damned.” O man, it is but another way of saying you have full permission to do it, for you are threatened if you do it not! Come, then; come now, right joyfully! “Keep not back.” Confess your sins with repentance, and lay them on Christ by faith, and you shall be saved!

Dear brothers and sisters, many of you have come to Christ and have been saved, and to you the text says, “Keep not back,” in another sense. Do not keep back from confessing Christ; if you have the love of Jesus Christ in your soul, confess it, tell it to others! Never be ashamed of your Lord and Master; come and unite with His Church and people. You owe it to the church; you owe it to the preacher who was the means of your conversion! You owe it especially to your Lord and Master that you “keep not back.” I have heard of some who keep back because the Church is not perfect. And are *you* perfect I dare ask? Why, if the church were perfect, we could not endure *you* in it, my critical friend; I have no doubt whatever that you will find the Church quite as perfect as you are! There are others who keep aloof from the people of God because they feel they are not perfect themselves. My dear friend, if you were perfect, we would not want you because you would be the only perfect member among us—and having a very imperfect pastor, I do not know what we would do with you! We would find you such a speckled bird among us, that we should probably pray the Lord to take you home to heaven at once! I should like to have you *become* perfect, and the nearer perfection the better, but still, if you make no profession of faith till you are sinless, it will not be this side of the grave. No, confess Christ, for is it not written—“He who with his heart believes, and with his mouth makes confession of Him, shall he be saved”? Do not forget the confession of the mouth! “Keep not back”; and when you have done that, if there is any Christian quality that can be reached, do not despair of reaching it! “Keep not back,” and if perfection, itself, is attainable, never be content till you get it.

If you are a child of God you never will be self-satisfied, you will be always crying, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.” O that you may never be content with yourself! Self-satisfaction is the death of progress! You have come into the lowest seat at the feast, but Jesus says—“friend, come up higher.” And when you get into a higher room, and enter into closer communion with Him, He will say to you, “friend, come up higher.” Do not hesitate to climb higher in grace and fellowship! Let your prayer be, “Nearer to You, my God, nearer to You.” Be insatiable in the longings of your soul—hunger and thirst after His righteousness; covet earnestly the best gifts; grow in grace, and in the knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. “Keep not back.” There is no point in grace at which we are prohibited from aiming; we ought, none of us, to say, “I am all I can ever be.” Oh, no, let us reach to the front ranks by God’s grace, for He says, “Keep not back.”

Let me add if there is a brother who could do more for Christ than he is doing, let him “keep not back.” Could you preach? Well, there are plenty of places needing occasional ministers, and others that are quite destitute; I do not know a nobler occupation for a man who is in business in London than for him to be maintaining himself by his shop, or whatever else his calling may be, and going out to suburban villages on Sunday to preach! I often wonder why more persons do not imitate the example of some good brothers, whom I could name, who are in their business diligently, and who are also fervent in spirit in their Master’s work. What reason can there be that for every little church there should be a pastor specially set apart for the work? It is a very desirable thing wherever there are enough Christian people to be able to support a minister, that there should be such. But I believe we very much hamper ourselves

in our Christian work through always imagining that a paid person set apart to preach is necessary for every Christian Church. There ought to be more farmers who educate themselves, and preach in their own barns or on the village greens; there ought to be more men of business in London who seek to improve their minds, that they may preach acceptably, *anywhere*, the gospel of Jesus Christ! And I hope the time will come when our dear friends, the members of Churches in London, will not be so backward as they are, but will come forward and speak to the honor of the Lord Jesus. If you cannot edify a thousand, perhaps you can influence ten. If you cannot, with a regular congregation, continue to find fresh matter year after year (and believe me that is a very difficult thing), yet you can preach a sermon here, and a sermon there, and tell to different companies the same story of the Savior's love.

I do not know what special work you can do, but something is within your power, and from that, "Keep not back." Besides, there are all our street corners; in spring and summer, how delightful to stand in the thick of the throng and uplift the Crucified One! Of course, you are sure to have a congregation out of doors, and a congregation that is rather attentive, and sometimes rather inquisitive, and do not need to be so inconveniently crowded as we are in this Tabernacle! Take the wide sweep, cast the big net, and hope for fish! If you have any grace or gift, "Keep not back." "Alas," murmurs the glowworm, "I mean to shut up my lamp and hide under those damp weeds, and never shine again." What is the matter with you? "Why," says he, "I have seen the sun! I shall never shine again after seeing the sun!" That glowworm is stupid; if he were wise, he would say, "I have looked upon the sun, and I perceive with shame that my lamp is but a poor light, but for that reason I must use it the more diligently. The sun may well hide its light after 12 hours are over, but I must try to glimmer during the whole 24 hours, and so give as much light as I can, little though it is." You complain that you have but one talent; that is the reason for being doubly diligent with it! If you had five, they ought to be fully used, but if you have only one, you must put all your wits to work to make something more of it. At any rate, "Keep not back."

"Well," says one, "I think I could do something, but I am of a retiring disposition." I am afraid if I had been in the French army in the late war, I would be very much of the same disposition. But in a soldier, as a rule, a retiring disposition in the hour of battle is not much commended by his captain! You who are so modest (shall I say so *cowardly*?) that you cannot do for Christ what you ought to do, will have an account to settle with your consciences one of these days which will cost you a world of sorrow! Break through this bashfulness, this laziness (for it comes to that in the long run), this silly, wicked, shame! Pride must also be slain, for this hinders many; they cannot be so prominent as others, and therefore shun the work altogether. Get rid of all that cripples you! Shake all off by the power of the Holy Spirit, my dear brethren, and "Keep not back," for who knows but that you may yet bring sinners to Jesus; may save a soul from death; and hide a multitude of sins, through God's eternal Spirit? May it be so, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 43.

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